

Town Meeting Coordinating Committee

Meeting of Friday, May 14, 2010

Bangs Community Center, Room 101

Attendance: Nonny Burack, Carol Gray, Rob Crowner, Mary Streeter, Harry Brooks, Harrison Gregg (Town Moderator), Aaron Hayden (Select Board liaison); absent: Peggy Roberts, Dorwenda Bynum-Lewis.

1. Call to order: Mary calls the meeting to order at 4:37pm.

2. Electronic voting: With the assistance of Andy Anderson, Aaron will conduct a demonstration of electronic voting following the Town Meeting session on Monday, May 17. Fifty "clickers" will be available. A representative of TMCC will be invited to help introduce the demonstration, and TMCC members will assist in distributing and collecting clickers.

The committee and guests discuss and fine tune the survey that will be distributed on the evening of the demonstration. Carol states that the results of the survey can be used to craft a bylaw amendment if it is decided that one will be pursued. One need not be present at the demonstration to provide feedback via the survey.

Harrison states that a new bylaw would need to be framed in a way that allows for a legal vote if electronic voting is not feasible for any reason. A roll call vote could be added as an option. Mary suggests using blank cards on which could be written the date and vote number when necessary. Harrison states that he would not support the use of electronic voting unless it was used consistently -- i.e., whenever the moderator or anyone else doubts the outcome of a voice vote. He would prefer to keep using the voice vote first, but Carol notes that some people may prefer to use electronic voting for all votes. Other issues that would need to be resolved include: Would a counted vote still be made before moving to electronic voting -- or would all electronic votes be "tally votes" -- i.e., will the results be published? Or should the requirement to call a tally vote be retained?

While acknowledging that doing so could "muddy the waters", Harrison notes that other features of voting could be considered for amendment if a new bylaw is brought forward, such as the use of red and green cards to indicate the positions of speakers during debate or the use of a consent calendar, neither of which have been successful in Amherst recently. Carol suggests that a committee drawing from various constituencies be formed to work on possible bylaw changes.

Aaron states that the price of an electronic voting system would be in the range of \$12,000 to \$21,000 depending on features chosen and possible price changes as upgrades are introduced between now and the time of purchase. Future costs would likely be limited to replacing damaged or lost clickers because the software includes automatic upgrades and the receiver will not become obsolete. Harry notes that negotiation or competitive bidding might bring the price down. Mary wonders whether a grant might be available. Mary states that it has been estimated that total town staff time spent on handling voting would be no different if electronic voting were implemented, though the particular members of the staff doing the work would probably be different.

3. Town Meeting review: The committee and guests briefly discuss the structure of debate and calling the question. Mary expresses appreciation for Harrison's remark that Town Meeting service is not as onerous a time commitment as sometimes reported. Carol states that some of the speakers have exceeded the established time limits, and Harrison agrees that speakers should be required to ask for extra time in advance. Carol and Mary suggest that members of CPAC and JCPC be seated at the front when articles relevant to those committees are moved.

4. Other issues: Nonny questions the provision for non-elected ex officio members of Town Meeting voting on bylaw changes and other substantive matters. Mary suggests inquiring with the League of Women Voters about why the Town Government Act allows this. Mary suggests that the committee also look into how the Finance Committee is chosen.

5. TMCC election: Eight candidates have submitted nomination papers: Gavin Andreson, Claire Bertrand, Nonny Burack, Dorwenda Bynum-Lewis, Chris Hoffman, Adrienne Terrizzi, Peggy Roberts, and Mary Streeter.

6. Next meeting: It is noted that the committee may have a different makeup the next time it meets (and before the current committee has a chance to review the minutes of the previous two meetings plus this one), but that Peggy customarily calls both former and current members together for the first meeting after an election.

7. Adjournment: The meeting is adjourned at 6:03.

Respectfully submitted,
Rob Crowner

Documents distributed at the meeting: none.